

A SURVEY OF TEXT-BOOKS FOR TEACHING AMHARIC: GRADES 1-12

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THE PROBLEM:

The most important function of the modern state is undoubtedly the provision of an adequate education for the younger generation. Charles M. Sherover, author of *The Development of the Democratic Idea* says: "The ultimate standard of judgement (of the activities of the modern state) is not the efficiency with which affairs are conducted but the kind of citizens a society produces. What kind of citizens do we want to raise? In what ways should we like to see our own generation different, and how would we wish to alter the development of the next?"

Inspired by such questions, one is led to raise other specific but related questions and suggest some possible answers. What are we, the educators, giving to our young citizens in the elementary and secondary schools as part of their language education? What are the kinds of books that these students read? What are the values embodied in these books? How long do we wish to retain without change any list of books prescribed as part of an official curriculum? Which books should be replaced by which others? Which books should be retained?

THE RESEARCH:

Before going to the description of the text-books for teaching Amharic in the schools, I would like to say a few words about the first draft of this study. The first draft was written in 1969 as part of the Language Survey in Ethiopia. The Language Survey of Ethiopia, part of the Survey of Language Use and Language Teaching in Eastern Africa was an attempt to respond to the need for basic types of information about language use and language teaching. When the first draft was completed it went into the hands of Professor Bowen of UCLA, who later passed on many valuable criticisms on the paper to me. It was Professor Bowen also who sup-

plied the text - books and other necessary raw materials for the research, on behalf of the Ford Foundation and I would like to thank him for all the assistance he gave me then.

Since the first draft in 1969, I have revised part of the material but it remains mainly descriptive for there is a need just for this type of basic information. All suggestions for change are clearly implied in the descriptions. The description is limited only to books approved by the Ministry of Education and fine Arts for use in the schools all over the country.

As far as I know the first Language Survey draft never came out in print. I hope that the study when it comes out in print will help the task of future language curriculum planners, text-book writers, course writers and even parents who sometimes may have to choose the best of language books from available Amharic text-books, readers and grammar books, for their children.

And now to the discussion proper.

Textbooks for teaching Amharic in the schools are best considered in two groups, one each for elementary and secondary classes, since availability, pertinence and usefulness etc. are somewhat different for each level.

Elementary Level

Elementary level textbooks can be characterized as not available in abundant quantity or variety (usually only one book in each category for a grade no alternates to choose from) and not extensive in length of coverage. Twenty-one books in the categories of primers, readers, grammars, handwriting manuals, and one literature text have a total of 1382 pages, an average of 230 per year. This limitation is particularly notable in the two grammar texts, which average a meager 33 pages each. None of the texts are up to international standards in design and production.

These textbooks, the majority produced by teams of writers, advisers, illustrators, calligraphers, research assistants, etc., are adequate in the hands of an imaginative teacher, but teachers' guides would certainly be a helpful supplement. The separate texts at each level could be better integrated, and other improvements would be possible in revised editions.

The readers (primers, story books, literature books) are primarily experimental editions of series of texts produced with the help of expatriate advisers. In general they present

folk tales and anecdotal biographies of world and national figures. The most conspicuous shortcoming is the absence of exercises or suggestions for classroom use. One of the problems of the readers is grading which cannot be done easily on the basis of style or level. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that in Amharic there are no very clear distinctions in the levels of usage comparable to those one would readily notice in examining elementary and secondary school readers in the United States, for example.

The grammars follow the general traditional, European school grammar, with notional definitions of terms and explanations that follow Latin models. The more recent ones were prepared by an Ethiopian author in the Ministry of Education & Fine Arts Curriculum and Research Department, with indirect advice from foreign educational technicians.

The two handwriting manuals are the first attempts at pedagogical presentation of the Amharic syllabary. Previously writing was taught without texts, primarily by copying. The two manuals are relatively brief, with one lesson per character, but they do have adequate (though not an over-generous supply) of exercise material.

The elementary-school texts are presented below in an annotated bibliography. Note that the date in the English entry are in Gregorian calendar.

Amharic Primers and Readers:

1. Gebre Wodajo, *Fidel Book*. Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press, fourth edition, 1967, 95 pp. (Grade one)

This book is a modern, experimental attempt to teach the Amharic characters using words and simple sentences as contexts.

In the traditional way, the student learned the 202 principal characters of the Amharic language by rote, repeating them, first in one order and then in several other orders usually in a sing-song pattern until he knew them cold. Only then he would be allowed to see the characters in words or sentences, mostly in the form of the Epistles of John in Geez, the classical liturgical dead language of Ethiopia. The author of the new *Fidel* book certainly succeeds in getting away from this practice of rote learning and in starting with

Amharic instead of the Epistle of John as a beginning reading passage. Still the author does not completely succeed in his new Fidel book for a number of reasons. First there is the problem of "character control" or "character choice." There is nothing available to indicate which of the characters or groups of characters should be introduced first and which next.

Secondly he runs into problems of vocabulary control. The author thinks of a word in which to present or teach a certain character. When he finds one, it may be a word that cannot be understood easily by a beginner or one that the student rarely meets either in his speech or beginning reading. In the absence of a basis for choice, the author may use an unnecessarily difficult or rare word. Something of this kind also happens on the sentence level. The student reads a sentence which contains four or five characters he wants to practice reading, but each sentence is different from the one he has previously read, and each is isolated from the others. The only piece of connected passage in the whole Fidel Book consists of the last three pages, which contain the words of three songs and a prayer that almost all children learn at one time or another. These are the morning and evening flag song, the National anthem, and the Lord's Prayer in Amharic. But the Fidel Books in the hands of a trained teacher are the best available. The first man under whom the first experimental edition, of this same Fidel Book was prepared was Dr. Russel C. Davis, a Harvard language research scholar. I have no doubt that he was aware of the shortcomings of the fidel Book. the first Edition was produced in 1956 by the Cooperative Education press which was then a section of the Ethiopian and United States cooperative Education Program, EUSCEP.

2. Ministry of Education, *My Green Companion*. Addis Ababa Commercial Printing Press, 1964, 84 pp. (Grade one)

This book is written and specifically designed to be used in conjunction with the *Fidel Book* (entry 1). It creates contexts for reading, built around animals like cows and sheep or dogs. It names and describes common objects like a pencil, a hut, a motorcar or a bed. It talks about little friends who go out for fun and about children who play the gardener or farmer. There is always a boy or a girl involved in the story. The language used is simple and the print clear.

3. Gabre Wodajo, *Lemma and His Family*. Addis Ababa: Materials Production Center, 1965, 31 pp. Second edition. (grade one)

This is the first of the Lemma series of books. Lemma is an ordinary six-year-old Ethiopian boy, whose family is described in this book. The writings very clear, with sentences that are simple and suitable for the level intended.

4. Gebre Wodajo, *Lemma at school*. Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press, fifth edition, 1967, 31 pp. (Grade one)

This is the second of the Lemma series. The book tells of Lemma's preparation for school. The language in this book is simple, but it has very little story interest.

5. Gebre Wodajo, *Lemma at the Market*. Addis Ababa: St. George Printing Press, 1958, 32 pp. (Grade two)

This primer is the third of the Lemma series. It tells of how Lemma spent a day at the market, providing additional reading context, but without any systematic method of introducing new words. The market theme interests children, and this is one of the book's strengths. It is substantially more difficult than the two earlier books in the series.

6. Tefera Wondimagegnehu, *My First Reader*. Addis Ababa: Materials Production Center, 1965, 60 pp. (Grade two)

Some of the story material in this book is based on country life in Ethiopia, with illustrations depicting farm life and farm animals. Some stories from the Ethiopian folk tale collections are written in simple amharic, introducing the most common everyday action verbs. Suggestive pictures accompany the stories. There is a very strict control of grammatical structure as exemplified by the story of Alemitu and Almaz, two ordinary Ethiopian girls from the country, in the story of the cruel stepmother, or in the humorous story of Mamo the fool. At the end of the book there are comprehension questions to accompany each story, and the most useful content words are listed in alphabetical order. There are no suggestions as to how this list of words should be taught.

7. Ministry of Education, *My Second Reader*. Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press, fourth edition, 151 pp. (Grade three)

This book is a collection of 17 Ethiopian folk tales plus one from a foreign source (readily noted from the names of the main characters and the setting). Although the folk stories in this book are meant for grade 3 students, there is no reason why these same stories could not be read, perhaps with greater enjoyment, by students in higher grades or even

in secondary schools. The language is neither esoteric nor juvenile. It is simple, clear, and therefore generally communicative.

One of the book's strong points is the excellent choice of words to picture the substance of the story, which perhaps should not be surprising in tales refined by preservation in folk literature. The folk character of the stories is brought out very clearly: in one story you meet the wicked stepmother, in another you meet animal characters that talk like humans, and in still another you have a monster doing monstrous things.

Each story is narrated in the third-person style, each with a lesson or moral (foolishness is laughable, honesty prevails, etc.). Some of the stories have expanded meanings which the classroom teacher can discuss with his students, since meanings vary with the experience and sophistication level of the students.

Two of the stories are in verse, written in praise of the motherland and nature.

This book like its predecessor has comprehension questions to accompany each story.

8. Lulsged Alemayehu, *My Third Reader*, Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press, third edition, 1967, 81 pp. (Grade four)

This book contains additional folk tales. On the whole the narration is not as good as in book two, but the illustrations are more generous and more imaginative.

9. Yared Gabre Michael, *The Animals Speak*. Addis Ababa: Merha Tibeb Printing Press, 1947, 34 pp. (Grade three)

This is a series of capsule biographies written as if by the cow, the bull, the sheep, the goat, the donkey, the horse, the mule, the camel, the dog, the cat, the hen, and the bee. Each of these animals discusses the role he has played in the service of man and what man has done to him. The entire book is in verse with simple, effective, and beautiful language.

Amharic Grammars:

10. Teckle Mariam Fantaye, *My Functional Grammar: Book one*. Addis Ababa: Material Production Centre, 1964, 35 pp. (Grade three)

This grammatical presentation treats the sentence, noun, pronoun, and adjective. The approach is traditional, but presents Amharic as a first language. The book contains numerous exercises (approximately two-thirds of the text) for practice in identifying parts of speech and constructing sentences leaving about twelve pages or explanation. It is an inadequate analysis that does not deal with Amharic on the basis of its own structure.

11. Tekle Mariam Fantaye, *My Functional Grammar: Book two*. Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press, 1966, 31 pp. (Grade five)

This sequel text treats the verb, adverb, preposition, conjunction, and exclamation. Again the approach is traditional. Since volume 1 is listed for grade 3 and volume 2 for grade 5, it is not clear what is done in grade 4 and 6.

Amharic Handwriting Manuals:

12. Lulseggad Alamayahu, *Handwriting Torch or Amharic Handwriting Manual*. 1956 G.C. 67 pp. (Planning, editing, and drafting by Owen R. Loveless) (Grade three)

The first few pages consist of prewriting exercises-formation of lines, combinations of lines and different shapes. Each presentation of a character is accompanied by explanatory notes, written in a language and style that appeals to children. With familiar words suggestive of pictures, the pupils are taught how one character is made distinct from another very similar one. The notes stress the importance of correct writing positions and postures, correct holding of the pencil, correct placement of hand and paper, economy of movement in forming a particular character, size and proportion of each letter. The approach to teaching adopted in the book is to encourage the student, and not frighten him by assigning overly complex tasks. Review lessons are given at appropriate intervals. Methods of comparing, contrasting and of simple straight forward description, noting differences and similarities are used throughout the book. The book illustrates the formation of clear, legible and distinct characters rather than an aesthetic production of beautiful calligraphy, as judged by the standards of traditional manuscript writing, since handwriting for general, modern use must emphasize legibility and speed of production to make writing a maximally useful educational tool.

13. Teklemariam Fantaye, *Handwriting*. Addis Ababa: United States Cooperative Education Program Press—Ethiopia, 1952, 47 pp. (Planning and drafting by Yigazu Bistat) (Grade three)

The aim of this handwriting manual is the same as that in the preceding one, but the approach is more analytic, breaking a shape or character into its natural parts and practice each part separately, then showing how the whole is derived from its parts. The assumption is that this method lessens the burden of remembering and writing a new character. The preceding book occasionally uses this analytic synthetic approach, but usually proceeds to teach the whole character without breaking it up and rationalizing its parts. Loveless' book is by far less complicated than Yigezu's. Using Loveless' book one gets a sense of progress; using Yigezu's book one gets the feeling that he is caught in the pleasure of analysis, synthesis, and experimentation, a process which has the virtue of producing characters of superior beauty, as judged by traditional standards of calligraphy.

Amharic Literary Series:

14. Ministry of Education, *Stories and Images: Book one* Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, fifth edition, 1958, 82 pp. (Grade five)

This book contains a selection of readings, in both prose and verse, by Ethiopian writers. It is the first of a series of three books—the first readers published after liberation in 1941—they were not only the first readers for school children but also the first books containing lessons in citizenship. All three start out with a definition of country, people the flag, independence, and the Emperor. After this commonly shared introduction, each book brings together a variety of reading selections. Book One is probably the best and the most interesting of the three. All the pieces or selections are didactic as well as instructional, and are especially appropriate to the time they were written and to the aspirations of people who were determined to build a new nation after a bitter experience with an alien occupation. Some of the narratives speak about the importance of education, the dignity of labour and the shame of living as a social parasite, about justice, good moral attitudes, the virtues of love, honesty, humility, the importance of an act of kindness even to an enemy, national integration, healthy parent-child relationships and good upbringing.

The parts written in verse form a very easy and clear introduction to the methods of *genè* poetic composition in Amharic—a very significant part of the Ethiopian literary heritage.

Note that for some reason the sequence of book numbers and grade assignments run counter to each other.

15. Ministry of Education, *Stories and Images Book two*. Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, fourth edition, 1958, 84 pp. (Grade four)

Book two is probably the least interesting of the three. It is all in prose and conspicuously didactic in approach. Every now and then one comes across topics that may well appeal to children such as lessons on kindness to animals, the story of two incompatible companions like the hyena and the donkey, the difference between doing and dreaming, helpfulness to other people, the importance of applying oneself to work, or a visit to a workman's shop. All these narrative pieces can be used as model paragraphs for later student compositions. Vocabulary study can be developed around the words in the stories, but responsibility for doing this is left to the teacher.

16. Ministry of Education, *Stories and Images Book three*. Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, fifth edition, 1962, 77 pp. (Grade three)

The selections of this book, in both prose and verse may be of interest and of educational value to children. Some of the pieces in verse are reflective, some narrative. The narrative prose pieces are connected paragraphs on such topics as "An Impartial Judge, Socrates, Voltaire, A man and a monkey, Death, the Leveller" etc. some of which are translation and some original in Amharic.

17. Ministry of Education, *Your Stories*. Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press, fourth edition, 1967, 104 pp. (Grade five)

This is a collection of folk tales from Ethiopia with line-drawing illustrations. The narrative style is similar to *My Second Reader*, with most stories told in the third person. Only one is told in the first person, where the author is the main character of the story. The story, titled "My Life in Brief," is very interesting because of the vivid but unusual imagination of the story teller.

18. Maaza Bekele, *Travellers of Long Ago*. Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press, second edition, 1968, 33 pp. (Grade five)

The items in the Acquaint-yourself series are not specifically designed to improve language skills, but rather to widen the pupils horizon through reading. The first book contains stories of great travellers, like Vasco Da Gama, Marco Polo, Ferdinand Magellan, Christopher Columbus, Ibn Bututa, and the story of the exploration of the polar regions. Along with the stories are taught such study skills as geographical orientation and map reading. Students are encouraged to admire and emulate the characteristics of daring men and to notice the constant desire of man to learn about the unknown. The stories are translated from English.

19. Maaza Bekele, *Religious Leaders and Religions of the World*. Addis Ababa: Cooperative Production Press, 1960, 22 pp.. (Grade six)

This book describes the great religions of the world and tells about the men who founded them. In it are the stories of Moses, Budhda, Confucious, Jesus Christ, Mohamed, etc.

20. Maaza Bekele, *Men of Letters*. Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, third edition, 1966, 93 pp. (Grade six) (First published by the Cooperative Education Press in 1963)

This third book of the Acquaint-yourself series contains the stories of great men of letters and the arts, including such musicians as St. Yared, Deacon and Psalm Maker of the Ethiopian Church, King David, Handel, Mozart, Bethoven Chopin and Verdi. The poets, philosophers etc. include Homer, Socrates, Plato, Aleka Taye, Aleka Kidane Wolde Kifle and others from Ethiopia, William Caxton, William Shakespeare, Alexander Pushkin, Chrales Dickens, George Eliot, and Leo Tolstoy. Among the artists are Leonardo da Vinci and Ato Agegnehu Ingda from Ethiopia.

Unfortunately the vicarious experience that may be obtained from reading such books cannot be effectively realized without the use of teaching aids to go along with each of the chapters that describe the life of each men of letters or arts. For example, reprints of some of the works of Leonardo da Vinci, a copy of the works of Ato Agegnehu Ingda can make a great difference in reading and discussiion of the lives of these two artists, but these do not appear in the text.

Furthermore, the presentation of the humanities in the elementary grades demands more highly trained and broadly educated teachers than are now generally available.

21. Dejazmatch Girmatchew Tekel Hawariat, *Emperor Theodore: a historical play*. Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, fourth edition, 1968, 108 pp. (Grade six)

This full-length historical play is based on the life of Emperor Theodore. This biography appeals to everyone who likes to read about real adventure and about a great historical figure, one that seems larger and stranger than life. For this reason, it is particularly appropriate as the first play that a grade six pupil reads. The reader becomes absorbed with the story of battles—one after the other. An Ethiopian student cannot help feeling genuine pride for the life and work of the Emperor, his attempt to unite the fragmented Ethiopia of his time. Of what use are the qualities of a leader if the people—the chiefs, the clergy, the bishop and the masses—do not cooperate? How much can a leader do with only a handful of supporters? The life of Emperor Theodore is a mixture of defeats and triumphs, joys and sorrows, and death for reasons of pride and strong convictions. The student learns early in his life to respond to the nationalistic qualities and aspirations of Theodore, and these are very well presented in this book.

Secondary Level

The textbooks for teaching Amharic in the junior and senior secondary schools of Ethiopia contrast in many ways with those of the earlier and consequently they are not well graded in an order of increasing difficulties. Also there is no effective control of vocabulary or structures and no exercises aimed at specific teaching points beyond general comprehension questions. As a result many teachers lack full confidence in the value of some of these texts.

Typically the secondary texts are produced by authors working alone, usually authors not themselves involved in education, many who have not attended as students the secondary schools they wish to serve. Adoption of their books as school texts is sought as a means of expanding the market. The books are of appropriate length, but the themes treated are repetitive, showing a marked lack of variety.

It is difficult to revise the Ministry's list of approved texts. For one reason the E.S.L.C. Amharic examination is based on the selected list and the circle of teachers, students, examiners, is not easy to break.

One hopes, nevertheless, that the superior dramatic intensity, imagination, and power of the new literature as represented by the works of many literary figures as Mengistu Lema, Tsegaye Gabremedhin, Haddis Alemayehu, Haile Iyesus Fikadu, Tadesse Liben, Birhanu Zerihun, Alemayehu Moges, and Sahle Sellassie will in the very near future replace much of the mediocre writing that is now part of the Amharic courses in the schools from the elementary school to the university. These are the masters of the new Ethiopian literature—the literature that reveals the problems, beliefs, and aspirations of present day Ethiopia. It is possible that some of the works may not be within the limits of the elementary and high school reading abilities, due to difficulties of style, vocabulary, or content. But most are simple and easy to read, communicating deeply the spirit of contemporary Ethiopia.

There is no shortage of submissions to the Ministry by hopeful authors, but most are hopelessly irrelevant to the needs of students. Authors of new manuscripts for consideration are now asked to analyze the curriculum, determine where their submission fits in to justify replacing the currently approved text, and to state the list of resources consulted in the preparation of their manuscript. This has had the effect of discouraging authors whose works have been haphazardly produced, but books approved through this procedure should be of a better quality.

The secondary texts currently in use to teach Amharic are listed below, with descriptive comments for each item or series. Again each entry is numbered.

Literature for Junior Secondary:

22. Tekle Mariam Fantaye, *Resemblance of Paradise*. Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, second edition, 1968, 155 pp. (Grade seven)

This short novel does not succeed as a work of art, though an interesting experiment in imaginative writing. The story is an attempt to describe an ideal village, its people, and the good life they lead. In effect, the writer is saying that he would like to see similar villages in all parts of Ethiopia.

23. Beimnet Gebre Amlak, *you Cannot go dack to Childhood*. Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, third edition, 1965, 160 pp. (Grade seven)

This is a story of a very happy childhood in an Ethiopian setting.

Composition:

24. Tekle Mariam Fantaye, *A Guide to Composition Writing*. Book I. Addis Ababa: Curriculum and Research Section, Ministry of Education, second edition, 1963, 49 pp. (Grade seven)

This book describes how an Amharic sentence is analyzed into its component parts. The assumption is that if a child learns about the structure of the Amharic sentence, he will be in a better position to produce good sentences of his own.

25. Tekle Mariam Fantaye, *A Guide to Composition writing*. Book II Addis Ababa: Curriculum and Research Section, Ministry of Education, second edition, 1963, 69 pp. (Grade eight and nine)

This is a continuation of book I (entry 24) the composition guide for grade seven. It treats the four traditional forms of writing—narrative, expository, descriptive, and argumentative,—at an elementary level. It also presents materials on letter writing.

History:

26. Tekle Tsedik Makuria, *History of Ethiopia: Emperor Theodore to Haile Selassie I*. Addis Ababa: St. George Press, sixth edition, 1968, 236 pp. (Grade eight and nine)

This history book is used as a language class text. It is written in a readable and interesting style with events presented in logical sequence.

27. Kebede Michael, *Great Men* Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, third edition, 1964, 150 pp. (Grade nine)

This book is a description of the lives and works of some of the great men and women of history, written in simple and readable Amharic. The selection includes Homer, Demosthenes, Cleopatra, William Shakespeare, Peter the Great of Russia, Frederick the Great of Prussia, Napoleon I, and Goethe.

Avanced Literature:

28. Assefa Gebre Mariam, *Gone for Ever*. Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, 1965, 154 pp. (Grade ten)

This book treats the impact of the Italian invasion (1935) on the traditional social and cultural patterns of life in Ethiopia. Though the author is interested in a particular period of Ethiopian history, the work as a whole does not include excessive historical detail. With a few dramatized incidents the author succeeds in picturing the tensions that came with the Italo-Ethiopian war, the humiliations and degradations that many Ethiopians went through at the hands of the enemy and how these same humiliations aroused rebelling forces. It also shows the plight of those whose mothers, fathers, or husbands were killed in the turmoil of the period, the number of broken homes and the resulting introduction of commercial prostitution. In his book the late Ambassador Assefa Gabre Mariam is willing to forget the temporary damaging influences of the war, but fears that some practices such as prostitution and the declining marriage rate that came as a result of the war may have come to stay. He fears that these practices, changes in the traditional Ethiopian scene, might bring permanent damage to the personality and basically religious temper of the Ethiopians.

The language is straightforward and clearly readable.

29. Dejazmatch Girmachew T. Hawariat, *Araya*. Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, second edition, 1968, 350 pp. (Grade eleven and twelve)

Araya is a novel on the theme of "The Apprentice Years." It tells the story of a young Ethiopian with many years of study and residence abroad. When he returns to Ethiopia, he begins his apprenticeship with all the dedication, determination, and innocence of the recently returned student. His confidence is put to the test by a society that distrusts new ideas. He persists in introudcing changes, but in the middle comes the unexpected Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935-1940. With his people, he goes to the war front. During the time, he sees the ordeals of his people in the hands of the conqueror, but as a good patriot, he does not give up until victory comes.

After liberation his life becomes more quiet and peaceful, but he cannot follow a sedentary life. He receives a call to duty and so goes back to government service.

The language in the book is not simple; the sentences are mostly long and complex, but the style is rather leisurely and dignified. The details are lifelike; childhood, school days, a chance for a university education abroad, returning home, mixed feelings, memories of Paris, war with the enemy, defeats, victory, love, wedding, work and the first years of headaches: all these are included in balanced proportions. One is willing to read and to reread *Araya*. The general tone is one of a happy fulfilment of one's devotion to country.

30. Balamberas Mahteme Selassie Wolde Meskel, *Amharic Poetry*. Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, second edition, 1968, 337 pp. (Grade eleven)

This book is a collection of over 1000 traditional "poems" in Amharic, forming a large part of the literary legacy of the Ethiopian People. Each poem consists of a couplet—a common Amharic verse form made up of two rhyming lines, condensed in meaning and complete in message. The subject matter of such couplets is as varied as the experiences of human beings themselves. Each poem is followed by an analysis of its meanings and references to allusions are given.

The author and collector of the poems is Haile Selassie I Prize Winner for literature, distinguished not so much as a creative writer as a notable and prolific cultural transmitter.

31. Afework Gabre Iyessus, *Tobiya*. Addis Ababa: Curriculum and Material Development Division, Ministry of Education, second edition, 1958, 55 pp. (Grade twelve)

Although this book is the first long prose novel in Amharic, it is not the work of a beginning writer, but of a sophisticated stylist—a master craftsman of the Amharic sentence. It is unfortunate that the setting of the story is unspecified; the author has chosen to be vague on this aspect but nevertheless produces vivid descriptive passages. Also the story interest is weakened by the primitive nature of the plot based as it is on numerous, unrealistic coincidences—a person getting lost without any cause, another person setting out to find the lost one and doing so by chance, etc. Such shortcomings rob the book of a measure of the fictional illusion that is usually the mark of the realistic type of novel. Teachers in the schools are aware of these weak points, but when it comes to vivid writing or to the well formed sentence, there is no rival. The vocabulary level is very difficult; for this reason the Ministry version of *Tobiya* contains a four-page glossary of difficult words at the end of the book.